

## Grade 7 - Informational

### Edwin Perkins

Some people are born to be inventors. Edwin Perkins was one of those people. The Perkins family settled in Hendley, Nebraska, in the early 1900s. Although he was still a young boy, Edwin was already inventing things. Chemistry was a special interest. After his father opened a general store in Hendley, Edwin came across a new product called Jell-O®. A friend named Kitty introduced him to the dessert mix. Edwin liked it so much that he convinced his father to sell it in his store.

Inspired, Edwin began to invent similar products himself. After graduating from high school, he held many jobs in the municipality of Hendley. These included printing a newspaper and running the post office. At the same time, he continued to develop new products. Eventually he set up a mail order business, Perkins Products Co., to sell his creations.

Perkins invented an early aid to kick the tobacco habit. It was called Nix-O-Tine. He began to market this in 1918. That same year he married his childhood friend Kitty. In 1920, Edwin and Kitty moved the business to Hastings, Nebraska. This town had better rail service for shipping their products. By this time, Edwin had invented a liquid concentrated drink mix called Fruit Smack that became very popular. It was packaged in four-ounce bottles in six flavors. Mixed with water and sugar, it made a large quantity.

Fruit Smack was very successful. However, there were problems with its packaging. The glass bottles broke easily, and they were expensive to ship. Edwin came up with a solution. He developed a method to remove the liquid from the Fruit Smack. This left only a highly flavored powder. The powder, which became known as Kool-Ade, was put in envelopes. Edwin designed these, too. They were easy to ship because they were lightweight and unbreakable. Soon, the whole family was involved in packaging and shipping the drink mix.

By 1929, officially renamed Kool-Aid®, the mix was distributed to grocery stores across the country. It soon became so popular that the family dropped other products. They sold only Kool-Aid®. The Perkins family also moved their operations to Chicago in 1931. The larger city offered both better transportation and easier access to supplies.

During the Great Depression in the 1930s, the Perkins family lowered the price of an envelope. It went from 10 cents to 5 cents. This way, many families could still afford it. Perkins also tried to sell related products, like pie fillings and ice cream mixes. They never sold as well as the beverage mix. The sugar shortage during World War II also slowed sales. Things took off in the early 1950s, and Perkins increased production. Eventually he sold the rights to Kool-Aid® to a large food company.

The Perkins family continued to be involved with the life of Nebraskans. They were active in Hastings, where Kool-Aid® got its start. The family foundation made many gifts to city

charities and to Hastings College. Both Edwin and Kitty Perkins are buried in Hastings. In 1998, the legislature made Kool-Aid® the official soft drink of Nebraska.

